

Mayor Carlos Alvarez
State of the County – 2010 Address
Stephen P. Clark Center, Commission Chambers
111 NW 1st Street
February 24, 2010 at 10am

Thank you, Bill... our tourism guru and the man responsible for filling our hotel rooms. 2010 has gotten off to a spectacular start. With a boost from the Super Bowl and Pro Bowl... Miami-Dade's tourism figures are holding steady – no easy feat in today's marketplace. Good job, Bill.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our program participants, including the outstanding soloist who performed the National Anthem, and the members of the Miami Symphony Orchestra led by Conductor Eduardo Marturet.

Chairman Dennis Moss... Members of the Board of County Commissioners, Clerk Ruvin, Fellow Elected Officials, members of our Consular Corps, Mr. Manager, County Attorney Cuevas, Superintendent Carvalho, Department Directors, Miami-Dade County residents... and especially our county employees... welcome.

The State of the County address, as we all know, is the traditional, annual message that highlights the accomplishments of the past, new initiatives and where our government is headed.

I do not have to tell any of you that 2009 was an exceedingly difficult year. You know it. Your families know it. Your friends and neighbors know. Without question... it was the most challenging of my 33 years in public service. The days ahead will continue to test us... as we adjust to harsh, new economic realities.

Over the past three years, Miami-Dade County government has closed \$800 million in budget gaps. We are leaner than we have been in a very long time, but we still must do more.

So what can I tell you today? For one thing, there have been accomplishments – very significant ones – in the face of diminishing resources. We are moving forward.

Our priority is to hold critical services together... promote activities that advance economic recovery and growth. We are investing in what's important. Watch this.

"Take a look around. What is happening is unprecedented in Miami-Dade County's history. Together with public and private partners, we are aggressively building and upgrading facilities critical to our future success. Improving infrastructure is one of the most important roles of local government.

Transportation links, hubs and connectors, a sustainable water supply, new green spaces and recreational facilities, better street lighting, improved drainage, landscaping, beach restoration, expanded healthcare facilities, renovated libraries, new community centers, and more.

Hundreds of projects – large and small -- leaving an imprint across Miami-Dade. Some attracting international attention. Others largely invisible, but no less important.

Miami-Dade County -- modernizing our surroundings to compete in the global marketplace...and supporting thousands of jobs. We are on the move like never before... investing in what's important... and ensuring our future success."

What is happening is truly unprecedented in Miami-Dade's history. Investments in infrastructure are spurring jobs – thousands of them – and positioning us to emerge from the economic downturn better and stronger.

Working with partners like the Florida Department of Transportation, the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority, the City of Miami and others, we have billions of dollars worth of capital improvement projects underway. This public works push is not so different from Eisenhower's Interstate Highway System... or Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration or WPA... both of which had a profound impact on the physical... economic... and cultural landscapes of the United States. Miami-Dade's investments will forever change the landscape of our County. We must be diligent in maintaining and improving our infrastructure. Not only does it bring visitors to our community... it is vital to the people who call South Florida home.

A new, modern airport is evolving before our very eyes. Our two new terminals are turning heads. American Airlines – our largest carrier – is expanding service. New carriers are coming on board at an impressive pace. Our bond rating outlook is up. We are now number two in the nation for international passengers... surpassed only by JFK. We are Florida's busiest airport – with almost 34 million passengers experiencing what's new and better about MIA. Ladies and gentleman... the ugly duckling is on its way to becoming a swan.

On the drawing board, there are plans for a public-private venture to develop the 40-acre site where Pan Am Airlines once operated. We need a plan that's not only right for MIA... but right for Miami-Dade County.

A new, state-of-the-art baggage handling system – the only one of its kind in the country – will be up and running in the near future... and it will work... or as Aviation Director Jose Abreu has told me, he will be loading and unloading the luggage himself.

Like the airport... the stage is being set to transform our seaport. We will be ready in 2014 when the Panama Canal Expansion project is complete... bringing a new wave of Asian trade to our shores.

We are deepening our shipping channel to allow the world's largest container vessels in. Port Director Bill Johnson calls it the "deep dredge." We will be one of only three ports on the Eastern Seaboard with that distinction.

The long-awaited Port Tunnel is a go. We rolled up our sleeves and fought hard to get that project and nearly a half billion dollars in state funding. Site work will begin later this year.

With the port tunnel and the deep dredge we will be positioned to double our cargo capacity and at the same time relieve the congestion that has plagued Downtown Miami for so long.

Cruise business isn't taking a backseat. We remain the busiest cruise port in the world and we are working hard to keep that designation. We will welcome Norwegian Cruise Lines' largest ship – the Epic --- this summer. We are committed to working with our industry partners to provide cruise passengers with a top notch experience and keep them returning to the Port of Miami.

While talking about things important to our economy, let's not forget about agriculture. An unseasonably cold winter has damaged our agricultural industry. The farming community is hurting. We are working with the USDA and congressional leaders to secure additional funds to help those impacted by the freeze.

We are also being innovative. Locally grown produce is now showcased as “Redland Raised” in more than 1,000 Publix stores. With the help of stimulus dollars, growers are purchasing more fuel efficient irrigation pump engines. We are expanding agricultural opportunities by adding to the list of locally produced products... and opening the door to bed and breakfasts. The table in South Dade is set for agri-tourism – the place where agriculture and tourism intersect.

Only a farmer at heart could know what our agriculture industry needs. That’s exactly what Agricultural Manager Charles LaPradd is -- a farmer who knows what it takes to plant a seed and bring in a crop. His common sense approach to the relationship between the agricultural industry and government has been beneficial. Charles, please stand and be recognized.

While we are on the subject of the local economy, let’s talk about America’s pastime – baseball. Last summer, we broke ground on a new Marlins ballpark. You don’t need a time lapse camera to see the progress. Just look out your window the next time you’re riding along 836 – the ballpark is over 20 percent complete. Columns and beams are going up at a lightning pace. The prospects of hosting a future All-Star game are promising.

Whether you are a baseball fan or not... there’s no denying the ballpark is creating jobs – hundreds of them -- and just the kind we want – the local kind. More than 60 percent of workers on site live right here in our County. The Marlins are keeping their promises. We are making sure of it.

It is an economic boost we need right now. I know there are naysayers and skeptics, but I firmly believe that Major League Baseball promotes major league communities.

Speaking of big leagues, let’s consider the federal stimulus program and what it means. First of all, let’s not forget that federal dollars start with our tax money and we should not be embarrassed or reluctant to demand our share. We have aggressively pursued every single dollar and make no apologies for that. Nearly \$600 million applied for. More than \$230 million received and we are looking for more.

Even before “economic stimulus” was a household word – we began accelerating the contracting process for capital projects. Our own local stimulus plan is getting work out on the street as quickly as possible and keeping people employed. We have expedited \$576 million in contracts over the past 18 months. Are we aggressive? Absolutely. Are we justified in what we do? Positively. Are we going to stop before the job gets done? I certainly hope not. Just look to our bond program as one example.

Our voter-approved *Building Better Communities Bond Program* has reached the 5-year mark with hundreds of projects, large and small, completed or underway. From bridge repairs to drainage systems, sidewalks to sewers, the program has touched every neighborhood.

Yes, we have some very difficult decisions to make regarding the issuance of new bonds. Some might argue that this is not the right time to borrow. However, others would contend -- just as convincingly -- that while interest rates are low and building costs even lower, this is the best time to move projects off the drawing board. I would argue that we must find middle ground that is most beneficial to our residents, who are also our taxpayers.

The future of the bond program is not the only tough fiscal issue. As I said earlier, the economic realities are harsh. We are continuing to scale down services to live within our budget.

Neither the County Commission or I enjoy making cuts that impact our workforce. We see employees as human beings who deserve our every consideration.

Collective bargaining has drawn on longer than anyone would have liked, but in recent weeks, agreements were reached with a number of our unions. With the exception of one, we are very close to agreements with the rest. As things stand now, when all contracts with collective bargaining units are ratified, we are poised to save \$221 million in labor costs over the term of the contracts. Make no mistake, this has not been an easy process. There have been sacrifices made on all sides. We are thankful that we have maintained labor peace and avoided any disruption of essential county services. Despite very trying circumstances and continued uncertainty, our employees continue to display professionalism and an unwavering commitment to public service.

I know I speak for all of our elected leaders when I say that we value our county employees beyond all else. Without their contribution to government service and our community, we could not function. Take a look.

These employees, like so many others, have contributed so much to our community. That is why it is so painful to make reductions of any kind. Service cuts are not just about cutting services. They are about losing valuable members of our workforce.

Even as we face our own hardships, we are living up to our moral and ethical obligations to help those who are so much less fortunate than ourselves, including the residents of Haiti. We have assisted thousands of repatriated citizens – some seriously injured. Our employees have donated more than \$250,000 to relief efforts. More than a quarter of a million dollars – exclusively from our employees.

Even more importantly, Miami-Dade County has saved lives. Our Fire Department's Urban Search and Rescue Unit, Florida Task Force One, pulled eleven people out of the rubble alive. Let's stand and honor these heroic men and women.

We don't have to go to Haiti – 700 miles away – to find challenges that present no easy answers. Our public hospital is ailing... and there's no magic pill to cure it.

We know we have a moral responsibility to the poor and uninsured, but a cash bailout at Jackson is not the answer. A Jackson that is not fundamentally sustainable shortchanges patients and taxpayers.

Some tough choices lie ahead, but it is in all of our best interests to ensure Jackson succeeds. It will.

You know, the challenges Jackson faces are a small piece of the health care reform puzzle, and we all know our elected national leaders are struggling with that issue.

We are providing local options to get people insured. That's where Miami-Dade Blue comes in.

In conjunction with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida, we launched a low-cost health insurance program specifically with Miami-Dade residents in mind. For the working uninsured, this is a good, solid program. In seven months, nearly 2,000 people have signed up.

While I realize that 2,000 people might seem insignificant to some, this is just a start. We hope to expand the program to include many more of those who are uninsured. Healthcare continues to be on the forefront of the national debate. In Miami-Dade County, we have devised a strategy to deal with the problems the uninsured face. Let's recognize our Office of Countywide Healthcare Planning Director Janet Perkins for her spirit and dedication. Please stand.

We have a tremendous opportunity before us not only as it pertains to health care, but planning for emergency services, schools, and transportation. In a couple of weeks... the 2010 Census Form will show up in your mailbox. It's about money... and fair representation. Fill it out.

The more people counted, the more federal dollars we are likely to realize. An accurate count of residents can mean more services and better infrastructure. It is estimated that every person counted is equal to \$1,200 in federal funding. Miami-Dade County deserves its fair share. Like many communities with large ethnic and minority populations, we are considered a hard to count area.

I am calling on every one of you to be an ambassador of the 2010 Census. Help us ensure everyone is counted. Let's better understand our changing and diverse community and shape our future.

As Miami-Dade looks to the future, we are asking ourselves, what does a sustainable economy look like? We have a blueprint for staying "green" and sustainable called "GreenPrint". It's getting noticed.

Hybrid busses and waste collection vehicles will soon be part of our fleet. We have 30 green building projects in various stages of development, including the Children's Courthouse and the Marlins ballpark. A month from now we'll open the county's first environmentally-certified building made with recycled materials.

It's time to intensify our efforts. In the coming weeks, I want to meet with our Commission to discuss proposals that can incentivize green development create neighborhoods that put pedestrians first... and better preserve our future water supply.

We are at the forefront of green initiatives, but we need to make sure our efforts stretch beyond the confines of county government by forming partnerships with businesses, industries and residents. Commissioners, I need your help in shaping these proposals and turning them into policy.

As part of our sustainability efforts, we are using a \$1 million dollar energy efficiency grant from the Department of Energy to help not only local contractors but our struggling community-based organizations.

We have received approval to re-grant that million dollars for energy retrofit projects that will directly benefit local non-profit organizations. The money can be used to replace inefficient cooling and heating systems; change lighting systems; and even purchase energy saving devices and products. Local contractors will do the work and our community-based organizations will reap the rewards realizing both immediate and long-term savings on their energy costs.

Like our Community Based Organizations volunteers all over Miami-Dade County are fanning out across this community to help where help is needed. Our volunteer initiative called "V" – launched last year – has engaged thousands of our residents. It's changing lives. With us today is 9th Grade honors student Amanda Laura Guerra. She suffers from Muscular Dystrophy. We learned about Amanda when a family member

wrote to my office telling us that a physically challenging clean-up at Vizcaya last November made Amanda feel like part of a team. No one saw her disability only her volunteer spirit. Let's recognize Amanda who reminds us all of how rewarding helping others can be.

Last year was especially gratifying in that county departments performed in an exceptional manner. Several of those departments deserve special recognition for commitment to their primary goals and objectives.

Crime is down – way down – in unincorporated Miami-Dade. Murders, robberies and motor vehicle thefts all saw significant declines when you might expect the opposite in this tough economy. We won't take it for granted. A lot is expected from our new director. One thing we can be sure of -- Jim Loftus has a vision of where the department is and where he wants to take it. Director... you have our support. Please stand and be recognized.

Another department with proven results is Park and Recreation. It became the first and only parks department in the state to receive the Governor's Sterling Award for excellence. From dog parks to skate parks to beaches -- with facilities as diverse as MetroZoo and the Deering Estate -- our recreational experiences are second to none.

We are now partnering with municipalities to connect our parks and open spaces. Parks Director Jack Kardys's enthusiasm is only exceeded by his commitment to teamwork. Jack please stand and be recognized.

Like our neighborhood parks, we all love our animals. A record 13-thousand dogs and cats are alive and thriving today because of the work of our Animal Services Department. In fact, one of those pets is living it up at the home of our County Manager. Ask him about Udo when you see him.

Only one Animal Services agency in Florida can call itself the Agency of the Year – and it is ours. The Florida Animal Control Association recognized the work of Director Sara Pizano and her team. Now it's our turn. Dr. Sara Pizano, please stand. Thank you for your steadfast commitment to animal welfare.

I recognized our new Police Director earlier, but I would also like to acknowledge three more directors who joined us in the past year. Gregg Fortner is leading our Housing Agency with professionalism -- and humor. Curt Sommerhoff is setting a course for the future as our Director of Emergency Management. And Susy Torriente has given our Office of Sustainability renewed energy and focus. Please stand.

The bottom line is we are doing some amazing things in the face of adversity. Our leadership team has never been stronger. It is easy to lead when times are good and money is flowing. It's much harder to be an effective leader during difficult times when budgets are constrained and personnel assets are all but frozen. Make no mistake about it our financial situation could be worse. Just pick up the newspaper and read about governments in Florida and across the country that are facing literal bankruptcy if they are unable to balance their budgets. We, on the other hand, have a clear path to economic stabilization and security. We will prevail. We will prosper and we will come out of this as better elected officials, better managers, better leaders and better employees.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank some of the people who I believe have been pivotal in sustaining our County government during these trying times. First, County Manager George Burgess for his day to day management. His understanding of

the complexities of Miami-Dade County government and the inner-workings of our departments has proven indispensable in navigating the economic storms facing us. George, please stand.

Our County Commission and its Chairman Dennis Moss – in my opinion – do not get the recognition they deserve for the role they play in this community. Commissioners, you played a vital part in all of the things that I have talked about today. While we may have our differences on certain issues, the day-to-day working relationship is strong. We need to continue working together for the betterment of our residents. No one understands better than I that the challenges we face are far greater than any one person can tackle.

I would ask you now to stand together as we stand together in solidarity – committed to better, more effective government.

Commissioner Sorenson, before I ask you to stand again, let me say a few words. You have served with honor, integrity and distinction over the past 16 years. You have been a leader on a number of issues, but you will be best remembered as a friend of our environment. Perhaps the best compliment I could pay you is to say that you made a difference. You did. Commissioner, we will miss you. Please stand.

Before closing, I would like to recognize today as International Cuban Exile Day. We are a nation of immigrants and like all those who come to our shores seeking freedom and opportunity, we salute the thousands of Cubans who died in doing so.

In conclusion, I would like to say that despite a truly difficult year, we moved forward in some important and meaningful ways – ways that will allow us to preserve the State of our County.

2010 will present more challenges. But mark my words we will get through this. Our community has proven time and time again that it can adjust to difficult circumstances. We have proven that we will rise to the occasion. Throughout history, we have demonstrated our ability to bounce back from adversity. After all, we are Americans.

Our foundation is strong. Our will is even stronger. It is not about today. It is not about tomorrow. It is about the day after tomorrow. Thank you for being here. God Bless.